

Gallery 1957

ArtSoul Kojo HISTORY OF GHANA

16th February - 19th March 2021
Gallery 1957, Ghana



ArtSoul Kojo in his studio in residency at Gallery 1957, 2021

Gallery 1957 are pleased to present works by Ghanaian artist ArtSoul Kojo in his first solo show, 'History of Ghana' in Accra from February 16 to March 19 2021.

The African does not travel through time: time travels through the African, much like a river in which we each stand facing downstream. The water immediately surrounding us is the present, joining history as it flows past. This - according to the philosopher John Mbiti - is the African concept of time: "*a long past, a present and virtually no future.*" This does not mean we have no future, but tells us that the future floats somewhere behind us. We cannot speed it up. There is no need to turn around and wade into it. It is inevitable and will flow in our direction. We can only focus on what has already happened and (more importantly) what is taking place today; the latter being the aspect of time over which we wield the most control.

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Popularly known as **Artsoul Kojo**, Nana Danso Awuah-Asante is a self-taught Ghanaian contemporary artist whose work continues traditions of storytelling that evoke African visual symbolism, ultimately exploring how the human psyche processes the stranger aspects of our everyday lives, creating infinite new ways of looking at the world.

Showing from February 2021 at **Gallery 1957**, his installation *The History of Ghana* presents Ghana's story from the perspective of what is yet to be; futures in which our present is the past and our decisions and actions today have either healed our collective self or doomed us all to repeat the past until we perfect it. Through an endless cast of characters and motifs, Artsoul Kojo explores how our collective future is dependent on the thoughts and actions of free individuals today who can either harness that responsibility or squander it.

There is both a deep sadness and an anger that one experiences when one is cheated of one's history; history for which blood was shed, lives were lost and victories hard won. While researching this work, Artsoul Kojo was reminded that the history that he and his peers are taught is riddled with gaps. What little is left is tethered around colonial knowledge of far less relevance to African identity than the ancient knowledge it replaced. What remains of such ancient knowledge - around everything from wealth and migration to how we communicated and connected to the people, the planet, and the stars - has been stripped of context and left bare.

The History of Ghana is an attempt to find information and share it from a place deep within. Artsoul Kojo takes his inspiration from the elders' use of symbols as vessels to carry complex history and transmit it through time to our descendants. The human imagination has a well-documented ability to latch onto symbols as means of manipulating the world. Artsoul Kojo infuses *The History of Ghana* with shapes and forms inspired as much by the familiar as he is by things borrowed from the unknown. It takes gifted storytellers to stretch our collective imagination, weaving new realities and alternative narratives out of their observations of society. Artsoul Kojo honours African storytellers with '*theyewitness*': a character that pervades much of his art; watching on with wonder, bearing witness and quietly questioning society in surreal landscapes inspired by national history.

Walking through a multidimensional mural, the audience will be surrounded by dreamlike paintings depicting pasts that may look alien but *feel* familiar: visions of what it may yet mean to be Ghanaian when the Ghana we want is yet to drift through time towards us. Using the tapestry of time itself, ArtSoul Kojo invites us to commune not only with the ancestors but also with our descendants asking ourselves who we are, who we have been and who we may yet be.

Text by Kobina Ankomah-Graham

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About the artist

Nana Danso Awuah-Asante best known as Artsoul Kojo, is a Ghanaian contemporary artist whose art has gained recognition through his endless cast of characters and personalities; these address a broad spectrum of universal and existential philosophies with childlike appeal. His childlike strokes and elementary shapes recall the simple yet complex imaginations of the human psyche, laying bare the limitless possibilities of how one can perceive the world. Artsoul Kojo is a self-taught artist who began painting and creating art extensively as an outlet for coping with anything. As art depicts life, Nana Danso's symbolism portrays the reaction between the world and him. His work fuses aspects of storytelling, poetry combined with an impressionist and pop-art visual look.

About Gallery 1957

Based in Accra and working internationally, Gallery 1957 has a curatorial focus on West Africa. Presenting a programme of exhibitions, installations and performances by the region's most significant artists, the gallery serves as a vital platform, promoting West Africa's presence within the art scene by hosting ambitious exhibitions, providing resources for residencies and participating in international art fairs. Founded by Marwan Zakhem in 2016, Gallery 1957 has evolved from over 15 years of private collecting. The gallery now hosts two spaces in Accra – one in the Kempinski Hotel and another in Galleria Mall – and a London outpost in Hyde Park Gate.